Foxfire to Visit Australia - July 1990

Elliot Wigginton, the founder of Foxfire (the school-based oral history publishing project in northern Georgia USA) will be in Australia in early July this year. He will be accompanied by students from the project.

Wig is also (most recently) the author of Sometimes a Shining Moment (subtitled: "The Foxfire Experience - Twenty Years Teaching in a High School Classroom"), an inspiring and practical book, which has excited great interest and enthusiasm.

Wig is being brought to Australia by the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia (SPERA) and the Victorian Country Education Project (CEP). While final details of the itinerary are still being finalised, there will be several opportunities to hear Wig and his students speak, to meet them formally and informally and to discuss Australian projects with them.

* The group will be conducting workshops in several CEP areas during the first week in July (the last week of term 2) - for details, contact the CEP on (03) 329.5677.

* The group will be making a keynote address and offering workshops at the SPERA Conference at Lake Hume Conference Resort in Albury from 8-10 July. For more information and conference enrolment, contact Dr Don Reeves on (057) 62 3366 (or C/o PO Box 403, Benalla 3672).

* Connect in association with the Youth Research Centre (Institute of Education at University of Melbourne) will be organising an open workshop/talk at the University of Melbourne on Wednesday July 11th. This will begin with a less formal workshop session for those involved with similar projects between 5 pm and 7 pm (over a light meal) and followed by a more formal 'lecture' presentation on Foxfire at 7.30 pm.

Further details will be forwarded - but hurry and REGISTER NOW. The number of places (especially in the workshop) may be limited. Phone Connect on (03) 489 9052 or the Youth Research Centre on (03) 344 8251.

The next issue of Connect will be a special enlarged issue with background on Foxfire. Don't miss it! Spread the word about the visit!

Roger Holdsworth
We first met Richie Does at the National Workshop of Cultural Journalism in St Louis, Missouri, USA in 1979. A 13-year-old student, Richie made part of the presentation for the Paradise Project. Richie has kept in contact over the years, visiting Australia in 1987, at which point we interviewed him about the Paradise Project (see Connect 46/47, August/October 1987).

Richie has traveled on, continuing his interest in education. This letter arrived recently, an account written "between Majorca and Menorca, Balearic Islands, Spain":

This has been absolutely the most intense experience I've ever had. I've never worked so hard, felt so shitty, and at the same time accomplished so much. I'm sure that much of what I've contributed and gained won't be apparent to me until after my blinders are off in June at the completion of the year.

The program is called Watermark. It's based out of Landmark School, north of Boston. Landmark is a high school for dyslexics. Most of the students have reading, writing and comprehension skill levels below those of other students their age. Because their disabilities weren't recognised by schools before this, they also have low self-esteem and assorted and varying degrees of growing-up-blues/behavioural problems/humaneness - call it what you will. Watermark is the last chance for many of them to get themselves in sync with the "chronically normal society" (I read this description of the mainstream status quo somewhere!). And it seems like a pretty effective environment for this to occur.

Our boat, Te Vega, is a 156 foot gaff-rigged two-masted schooner, built in 1930. There are 27 students, 5 crew, a cook and 7 staff on board. The captain is Dutch, his wife is German, the second mate (my cabin mate) is also Dutch. Most of the students are Americans but we have one Danish student, two Dutch kids, a young woman from Iran/Indonesia/Holland/England, depending on how you look at her youth, and a new Swiss Swede ... 7 girls, 20 boys (most dyslexics are male).

We sail for one to five days at a time then have academic days in port - sometimes only three or four before sailing again, sometimes a couple of weeks at a time. We were in Lisbon for an overhaul that went over the scheduled completion time and didn't sail for nine weeks! Between Portuguese welders, Russian fishing trawler parts, giant War-of-the-Worlds-like cranes, continuous bell ringing, the Lisbon flu and shipyard smog, we all had our heads full keeping morale up. But
a few good sails into the Mediterranean
have picked us up as we prepare for a
three-week Spring Break beginning next
week. I'm going to Kenya to visit my
friend in the Peace Corps. I figured I
shouldn't pass it up since I had the time
and was almost half-way there already.

When we return in early April, we'll
begin sailing back towards Portugal and
up the western coast of Europe to
Amsterdam, where we finish in late May.
We had hoped to get further into the
Mediterranean than the Balearics but the
delay in Lisbon squeezed our itinerary.
What I'd really like to do is hijack the
schooner and sail to Melbourne!

Our schedule is rough here. We're up
at 7 am every day (5 am once a week
when staff do a morning watch duty on
deck) while in port. Kids do chores after
a short breakfast (students are on a
rotating galley crew). Classes start at
8:30 am and end at 4 pm. Then students
go to a 'small boats' class or do work
projects with the mates, where they learn
more about sailing and bust their butts
maintaining the boat. Another group gets
free time in whatever town we're in and
staff supervise them. After dinner, there
is some free time, then study hall (we
supervise) and lights out at 10 pm. There
must always be two students monitoring
the boat throughout the night too. Every
third day, each student ends up on a two
hour watch between 11 pm and 7 am,
where they check dock lines, record engine
room gauge levels, check the bilge to
make sure we're not sinking, and keep
giant rats and similar dock creatures off
the boat! We usually take field trips on
weekends.

At sea, we are divided into three
watches with one mate, two staff and
eight to ten students. My watch has been
on the 4 pm - 8 pm, 4 am - 8 am rotation
for the last few sails. We sail the
boat with rotating positions like bow-
watch, helm, engine-room check, and
navigation. The kids are amazing. I think
they take it for granted that they can sail
a schooner with a 400 ton displacement
through a storm or in a heavy shipping
lane. I'm learning a lot, too, and lately
have had much more time to do hands-on
sailing as opposed to supervising and
watching over the helm to make sure we
are on course. As the kids get more
responsible, I get more time to work
alongside them.

There have been some rough nights at
sea. From Madeira to Lisbon we broke
the gaff (a 40 foot long, 500 lb wooden
pole that holds the top of the sail up on
the mast). It just cracked in two during
a jibe in a storm. It was my first week
on the boat and I thought I was going to
die! We ripped two sails that same night.
But Te Vega is super seaworthy and I
trust her and the crew and the kids. That
is one of the main components of the
program actually. These students learn
that they have to support and trust each
other 24 hours a day, because how they
treat each other and organise their work
and feel about themselves at school in
can be a direct reflection on how we'll
all see each other as fellow shipmates at
sea, where our lives depend on each
other's work and attitude.

Teaching is a real challenge. I have
two low level Language Arts (English)
classes. One class is 14-17 year olds with
reading levels at about 4th to 6th grade.
The other is 16-18 year olds with the
same reading levels. I also have three
tutees every day on a one-to-one basis,
and I teach Phys Ed (which is really an
exercise in creative ways to use container
docks - we play 'dodge the 2000 ton
moving crane', 'run under the fork-lift
carrying a 3 ton container' and 'see how
close you can come to the edge of the
dock without falling in the harbour').
Dyslexia has a mysterious and different
role in each kid's learning process. Most
spelling is atrocious because the symbols
for words don't come out in the same
order that they go into the brain. But
we don't worry as much about that
(because they may never be able to con-
quer that little mix-up) as we do about
teaching them to organise, proof-read,
make inferences, see cause and effect re-
lationships, and just read, read, read,
write, write, write. Progress is painfully
slow, especially in my eyes because this
was all so new to me and I had to pick
it up with relatively no assistance in a
demanding environment. I think that
almost anything that we could do with the
students academically, would help them,
though. And the living situation and re-
sponsibilities of sailing a schooner may have
heavier implications for their lives and
even their academic skills than whether
or not they can readily identify a subject
and predicate.

Richie Does
JUNIOR SCHOOL COUNCILS ~ PART 2

JUNIOR SCHOOL COUNCILLORS SPEAK!

Why have Junior School Councils in primary schools? How are they organised? What do they do? What difficulties do they face? What plans are they making?

In this article, members of Junior School Councils in the northern area of Melbourne talk, write and draw about their experiences, plans and hopes.

In the last issue of Connect (#61, February 1990), we reported on the range of training activities held for members of Junior School Councils (JSCs) in the Victorian School Community Development Program networks of Carlton, Clifton Hill, Northcote, Preston, Preston East and Reservoir. This outlined the games, activities, workshops and information sessions/sheets used in several training days held over eighteen months.

These training days have continued into 1990.

These first sessions of the year, mainly with students new to the Councils, were a time to reflect on reasons for having Junior School Councils, on achievements to date and on plans for the year. They were also structured so that students wrote comments, built models and drew diagrams that could be published as their accounts of JSCs in this issue of Connect - the second of the two-part series on JSCs.

Approximately 90 students attended each of the two half-day sessions. They came from the following primary schools: on the first day: Bialas, Brunswick South, Fitzroy, Lee Street, Penders Grove, Princes Hill, Spensley Street, Westgarth; and on the second day: Bell, Burbank, Kingsbury, Lalor Park, Merrilands, Newlands, Preston, Preston East, Preston North East, Preston South, Preston West, Reservoir East, Ruthven.
The schedule for each day was:
9.00 Registration
9.15 Introductions and game
9.40 'Why have a JSC?'
   - video, discussion, report back
10.00 'Structures of JSCs'
10.30 Morning tea
10.45 Activity - game
11.00 Workshops:
   * Things that JSCs have done or hope to do
   * What things make it hard for JSCs to work?
   * Ways to make JSCs work better this year
12.00 Lunch

As distinct from many of the previous training days, and reflecting both the writing tasks and the early-in-the-year timing of the days, students worked in school-based groups for each of the sessions, mixing through games and informal times. It was pointed out that the next training day would mix students more.

Each school was provided with a work folder which included past information (from the last Connect) together with a copy of each of the worksheets for the day's sessions. In addition, at each session, all students received a copy of the appropriate worksheet. These formed the basis for discussion and writing. In some school groups, students worked individually or in small groups preceding and following whole group discussion; in others, a single sheet was completed collaboratively by the group of representatives.

In addition, on each of the days, various resource persons were present to assist and add to the day. In the first training day, Graeme Kent (a School Community Officer in Ballarat) worked as cartoonist, providing both his own interpretations of the day and drawing ideas initiated by students. Bronwyn Halls (freelance cartoonist) acted in this capacity on the second day. Cartoons from both these people are found throughout this report. In addition, members of Playback Theatre took part in the second day, stopping discussion at various points to act out situations that reflected and interpreted comments and actions. They also used drama techniques in report-back sessions to the whole group. Students and staff found both of these approaches extremely valuable.

The training day program was devised and organised by School Community Officers from the Networks listed above: Margaret Brown, Leigh Cook, Lidia Horvat, Mark McAuliffe, Ruth Modular, and Elise Peauret.

The following pages contain a summary of what student members of Junior School Councils have to say about their operation - their importance in the schools, their hopes for achievements, frustrations with difficulties, plans for action.

The words are the words of these students, transcribed from worksheets with only spelling and basic grammatical editing. We have included as many comments as possible, though have not included those which are directly repetitive of others. Thus the number of comments of a type does not necessarily indicate the numbers of students making such statements. Connect takes responsibility for the organisation of the student comments and for the introductory and interpretive comments within each section.
WHY HAVE JSCs?

Keep watch on the time!

Because it helps kids have a say at school.
Do Junior School Councils primarily exist to improve the school - its facilities, funds, activities and climate - or do they perform a learning role for students? Why does a school have a JSC?

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Some students saw a clear service role for a JSC which 'does things for the school': "To take pride in the school." "To look after our school; to organise things for the school; to buy new equipment." "We raise money for our school." "Fixing up the grounds so everyone is safe." "To show parents around the school." "They make school safer to play in; they keep the school tidy and neat." "The school's problems get solved."

In other cases, its service role is to 'do things for others': "To raise funds for charities." "To raise funds for anti-cancer and blind people and people who haven't got any clothes." "So we can raise money for poor people."

This service role is extended in a JSC that aims to 'make the school and its curriculum better': "To have ideas for the school: talk with our grades and the whole school; write to the School Council, Preston Council, shops, factories etc to let them know what we are doing and what we want; write reports (eg about today) in our newsletter; talk to parents at home; discuss everything at JSC meetings."

"So changes can be made throughout the school." "To make school more exciting and have things to look forward to." "So we have other activities as well." "The other students gave me ideas. I'm going to take them to the meeting." "We should be able to choose our own subject." "It also helps teachers to know what we would like to happen at our school."

"Because we understand the children better than adults most of the time; because at JSC we get class reports from the kids; all JSCs are kids so we relate more to them; we give them opportunities to have their say; we make money for them to have a better school; we like to hear what they have to say."

"It helps things in the school yard (like loose nails). Most teachers don't play on the equipment, so they don't see them."

A particular aspect of this is 'making school more enjoyable and caring': "Let all the children have a good time at school." "Makes school happier; more fun for the children." "It's fun." "We always do boring things - with JSC it's different." "To make sure everyone has a good time and a say in everything." "To look after the younger kids so they can't get hurt."

"It makes kids feel like it is more their school." "To run the school fairly."

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Other students talked directly about the JSC encouraging and allowing students to 'have a say' and a share in decision making, but often saw this also as a means towards school improvement:

"To communicate and cooperate with the whole school." "If the children have a say in what they want, they might get what they want." "We complain about what we want." "Because kids know what they want."

"Spend money on things that kids want: get a bike shed; clean out the shed; raise some money for locks; make a set of rules; keep the shed clean; and check on whether children are being responsible."

"Kids shouldn't be afraid to say what they feel; if kids have problems they should talk about it; all kids get a choice." "It's good to share ideas." "So teachers can get a chance to listen to children during a meeting."

"If we did not have a say, we would not get anything."

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There was, however, another significant cluster of reasons. These stressed the role of the JSC in student learning and development: "For the experience." "Experiences for later in life." "So kids have experience at organising things." "It shows that children are young adults." "Because they give us a chance to improve ourselves."

"It makes you feel important; so you will be proud of yourselves." "So children can solve problems as well as grown-ups; it makes children feel more responsible." "It helps kids build up their confidence and it is a good thing to think about."

"To learn to cooperate with the other members of the JSC and listen when they're talking." "We all work together as a team." "Cooperation with other people - compromise, consideration."

"Helps kids to listen to other people."

"Helps kids to learn to be quiet while other people talk; helps kids to think fast." "It helps kids to learn the skills and to get used to speaking aloud." "So kids get practice at speaking."

"It helps to learn to make your own decisions." "Stand up for yourself, saying what you believe in."

"Because it helps to learn about new things."
STRUCTURES OF JSCs

Butchers Paper
BUILD A MODEL JSC
Small Page Drawings

Remember, we haven't got long to do this! Use this string...

We should mention our office bearers like....

Let's draw it and start with Senior School Council at the top.

But how do we show where we fit into the school? Let's try and describe it in a short paragraph.

What are these arrows and string for ...... and what am I doing here?

Our School

Principal

JSC

JSC Rep
The second session is harder to interpret on paper. Students were asked about the structure of their Junior School Council - both internally and in relation to the rest of the school. To represent this, the students were provided with a pile of materials (from Reverse Garbage) as well as large sheets of paper and challenged to actually 'build' a model of their structure.

The representatives built innovative and intricate structures and diagrams to explain the composition of their Council and where it was placed in the school. Some likened the JSC to a cake, where the correct ingredients were important; others drew lines of communication to the rest of the school and the wider community.

More formally, one school described its structure as follows:

"Our JSC is made up of 24 members - two from each home group. They are children from year 2 to year 6. The JSC representatives are elected by the home group at the start of the year and are elected for a full year.

"At the first JSC meeting we elect (by secret ballot) a President (from years 5 and 6), a Vice-President (years 5 and 6), a Secretary (years 5 and 6) and a Treasurer (from years 4 to 6). Children going for President give a talk to the JSC as to why they would be 'good' for President and so on."

In most cases, descriptions or even photographs and diagrams of the models are inadequate to explain the complexities that students saw and depicted. We have, however, attempted to capture (via Bronwyn Hall's cartoons) some of the spirit of the responses to this activity.
Bell P.S.: A Tree

Lines of Communication & Activity

Basketball Court

Playground

Soccer Field

Oval

Gardens + Grounds

Students + Teachers + Principal

Reservoir East

School Council

JSC

School

Staff

S.Council

Vice Principal

President

Chairperson

Treasurer

Secretary

Preston East Primary
THINGS THAT JSCS HAVE DONE OR HOPE TO DO THIS YEAR

I thought the disco was excellent.

Jsc raised money for computers.
Some of the Junior School Councils present at the Training Days were only beginning discussions for 1990 with new members. However others had, through some of their representatives, memory of achievements in 1989.

Reflecting what they'd said about why JSCs exist, many of the reports focused on the fund-raising activities of the Councils. They had raised money or planned to do so, by holding: pie and barbecue days, chocolate drives, sales of Easter eggs, cash-a-can (recycling) drives, a wheel-a-thon, fun days, bazaars, fetes, raffles, teacher baby picture contests, a sleep-in, sausage sizzles, discos and cake stalls.

The money raised had been or would be used for: sports equipment, playground equipment (including an adventure playground), computers, games for classrooms, more indoor/outdoor plants and improvements to the teachers' car park (!).

"We are going to have an Easter egg hunt for all the children in the school for raising money for poor people."

"We are going to run two discos in term 1; and we are going to raise money for football goals and soccer nets. We talked about hiring hand dryers. And we might get a recycling bin."

"It would be great if we could do the can collecting again. That was a whoppa."

Others talked about the fund-raising process: "We surveyed all the grades to see what fund-raising they'd like and what people we'd give money to."

"We are organising a sausage sizzle for the grades 4, 5 and 6. We are not having one for the preps, 1, 2 and 3s yet - we are having one for them in the second term because we want to see how it goes with the upper school first. We are getting their orders and we are going to buy sausages and bread and sauce and when the day comes, the kids are going to pay for them. The sausages are going to be 50 cents. We need bread, sausages, butter and serviettes and cordial."

How appropriate is it for JSCs to spend so much time raising money, particularly for school facilities? On the other hand, such approaches to decision-making, planning and organisation can provide a 'safe' and easily initiated introduction to broader involvement in school/curriculum decision making.

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Some students reported achievements around the school, particularly in relationship to the canteen: "We made posters to advertise new foods in the canteen." "Changing foods in the canteen is more fruit." In a similar vein, others said that the JSC "hoped to get a canteen for the school."

Other talked about plans for improving the school environment: "Remove graffiti from the walls." "The behaviour in the playground - I want it to be fun, peaceful and safe from fights." "Stop littering - we've organised yard duty." "We are going to have a football day and we are going to make a cricket pitch." "Changing school rules." "Changing the place of the whole school excursion." "More homework for students." "I would prefer stricter rules because I'm sick of kids getting away with something they did wrong and having teachers say 'don't worry'." "We should have a computer in every classroom." "Fix the bell." "Organising grades for yard duty every week; organise bin roster and canteen rosters; work in the canteen, put bins in and out." "We hope to fix up the toilet block because it is falling apart in its old age. Plus drinking taps." "It was mentioned that we should have liquid soap in the toilets."

"We solved a problem by filling in the holes in the playground. We hope to resolve the yard duty and make the yard cleaner. We should make the fences higher so the footballs don't go over and saving children going outside the playground; and fix the holes in the fence as well."

"We want to improve the school environment: put your rubbish in the bin; plant more trees, plants and grass; cleaner not using any more fluoro-hydrocarbons; writing to press to stop cutting trees down for paper."

It is clear that the JSCs don't see themselves as taking sole responsibility for
doing these changes to the school, but rather as pressing for changes and sharing in the decision making about them. They do, however, express a sense of ownership about past and proposed changes to their environment.

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There were practical plans being made or reported on: "Get new locks on the toilet doors." "The JSC wrote to the buildings and grounds committee to fix our bat tennis courts." "Get the cricket nets improved." "Operating a JSC school guide program." "Helped organise a computer camp." "Investigate BTN/no more BTN." "More participation in swimming sports." "Initiate a radio program."

There were also strong links with groups outside the school: "The Mayor came to give us our badges and we started our school guides i.e children showing visitors around the school. We've taken Kirk's letter to the Senior School Council to get them to write to Preston City Council for a cricket pitch to be made in the park." "It would be great if we could write to the Mayor like last year and see more good people."

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The operation of Junior School Councils dominated the plans of other groups, particularly those just beginning. "Get a better JSC group." "Listen to children's ideas/problems/suggestions." "We hope to form a JSC this year with a President etc and with other members." "I would like to form a Junior School Council with proper members."

Following from this, Junior School Councils discussed how they would establish their role in the school. Plans for 1990 included: "Having a say about what happens in the school." "JSC listens to what students say." "We have class meetings with our class and we have a JSC meeting every fortnight. We talk about things in our class." "Grades give suggestions and we look through all of them and take out the most important suggestions." "We have to communicate and cooperate." "Report to grades on JSC activities and on what's happening in the school." "Articles in school paper and newsletters." "Invite guest speakers to schools eg the Mayor."

There was, overall, a feeling of optimism about the possibility for JSCs to make a real difference to their schools: "It's great how we can have a say in the things we want. It's terrific how children get a say in what happens in the school." "We should achieve what the people in our school want and for them to be happy in our school and be proud of us."
THINGS THAT MAKE IT HARD FOR JSCs TO WORK OR THAT I FEEL NERVOUS ABOUT

People talk about things that aren't on the Agenda.

Some people interrupt while others are talking at the meeting.

I get nervous when...
Being part of a Junior School Council and of a decision-making process is not easy, particularly for primary school students who are being introduced to difficult ideas and to the processes and tensions involved in making decisions.

Meetings have their own problems:
"Some people don't take things seriously." "We have lots of ideas and it's hard to choose which one." "Sometimes it's hard to come to decisions." "It's hard if people are being silly; if people don't listen; if people get more of a say if they are in grade 6." "Younger kids are scared to speak up." "Too many things on the agenda and not enough time." "Running out of time." "When everyone doesn't show up for meetings." "It's hard when the chairperson isn't taking control." "When people repeat things we've already decided about." "When people don't stick to the subject."

Sometimes it's difficult to distinguish between a discussion on a topic and a 'fight': "I get nervous about fighting, disagreeing, arguing." "It's hard when people disagree."

Doubts about one's performance as a member of a JSC become personally daunting: "If I can't think of anything and some people think I'm not good at JSC." "People say something to me that embarrasses me to say it to the teacher but I do it anyway." "I get nervous when I hear the clock tick when I am trying to finish something hard." "When it's happening too quickly." "People might laugh at you." "When people keep asking you the same question all the time and you don't know when you can do it." "I also get nervous when I think about whether I do my jobs properly."

And the responsibilities of a representative can have implications for students' personal lives: "Some decisions I have to make may affect my friendship." "I get nervous when I have to make a difficult decision which could lose a couple of friends." "It's hard when friends are taking advantage of your position eg asking for things cheaper at the canteen." "When people don't agree and blame us for the decision." "Some kids have silly ideas and want them done."

A representative might not agree with a decision or might not be able to persuade a Council: "When others don't agree with you but you are looking forward to it."

Facing pessimism and cynicism is particularly hard: "Kids telling you you're not doing your job well." "People who say everything is going to go wrong."

Communication is central to the work of Junior School Councils. This has its own difficulties for members: "Telling other people what to do when they are doing something wrong makes me nervous." "Sometimes members don't speak enough at meetings." "Sometimes it's hard to explain things to younger kids." "I get nervous when I have to report to other grades or the whole school at assembly." "Nervous when I have to speak up." "People who don't say what they really feel." "I get nervous when asked questions by people I don't know." "When I talk and no-one listens."

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Some of the difficulties are more 'external': "It's hard when people ask for things we can't give them eg horse-riding." "Not enough money to do things." "If the Principal doesn't care." "When you are really trying to do something and it doesn't work out." "I think it's hard for JSC when parents contradict the decision." "I get kind of upset because maybe a JSC will put a bad influence on my work." "I might miss out on work in class." "Some teachers dislike the idea of kids having a say."

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Finally, some students are very expressive about the difficulties they face:
"It is so hard. Sometimes people ask for something and you say it has been knocked back, then they don't like you. You have to be responsible all the time. It is also hard because if you get into a
fight you get kicked out. I also have to catch up on work. It's hard when part of me says go for it and the other part says shut up. It is sometimes difficult because if there is a meeting after school it affects picking up my next door neighbour. I get nervous when I say something that I don't know is good."

"Things that make it hard:
1. disagreeing, arguing;
2. being a chairperson;
3. when people ask you a question;
4. nervous about making mistakes;
5. for the minute secretary to write down;
6. silliness;
7. other children don't understand the JSC;
8. no time;
9. can't keep up with everyone;
10. confusion;
11. talking at once;
12. too many things on the agenda;
13. embarrassment.

I get nervous when I make mistakes and afraid that people won't like our ideas and that I will be laughed at."

"The first time I went to a JSC meeting I was nervous. If classes don't talk to their representative then the JSC doesn't get enough ideas. You can't always get what you want because the School Council says 'no', and not everybody wants the same things. Sometimes the things you want cost too much. Sometimes you don't have enough room for the things you want eg football or soccer goals. Sometimes you miss out on things in the classroom - sometimes they're good things and sometimes they're bad things. When I was coming to Kingsbury Primary (for the training day), I was nervous and I didn't think there was going to be so many people."
WAYS TO MAKE JSC BETTER THIS YEAR

All: JSC members should get a copy of the Agenda and Minutes before the meeting.

Early in the year, JSC could prepare a plan of things to do for the year and then publicise it for the whole school.

How about....

I you ask me, I think JSC should
The Training Days finally provided students with an opportunity to begin planning improvements to their activities and to the operation of their Junior School Council for the rest of the year.

In focusing on ways to improve the Council, some saw their principal task as ensuring increased fundraising: "Every JSC representative should at least think of two ways to raise money." "Make more big decisions on how to spend the money we have earned." "Raise more money for the school." "Have a fair; at school, sell all the junk that we don't need." "Have at least three or four fund-raisers a year. That way we could earn more money if one fund-raiser didn't go too well." "Do a lot of fundraising and make sure no-one has any reason to complain." "Have another apple drive during the year." "Two fetes a month." "Selling icy poles; a pizza day or how about giving money to charity - how about a disco or a mini-fete?"

Others began to define proposals for JSC initiatives: "Have people go around and make sure school is safe." "Having a bin in the toilet." "We should have more tennis courts." "Have more sports equipment." "I think we should have more trees in the school." "Get a room set up for the JSC." "The JSC to have a special uniform." "We need more chairs in the office to sit on, and tables. We could have chairs and tables to eat our lunch and have the meetings outside." "Start using report cards; introduce a suggestion box; we should have music in the classroom while we're working; start a behaviour card; start a newsletter; pupil of the week certificate." In summary: "To try and achieve all the things we set out to do this year; and to try to do what we say."

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However, most students concentrated on ways of improving the processes of the JSCs. 'Meetings that work' dominated suggestions:

We should ... "Have more meetings" ... "Have weekly meetings to keep up with events" ... "Ask the Principal to come to some of the meetings" ... "Listen to each other" ... "Listen to other people's ideas and not criticise them; not put them down" ... "Arrange a certain day every week or something for our meeting. We should also make sure that we are always organised in some way or another" ... "Co-operate with one another" ... Be very well organised, so people aren't fumbling around at the last minute before a meeting. I've seen too many do it!"
There were many direct and implied criticisms in the plans for change: "Don't change the subject all the time." "Don't bring up silly subjects." "Stop arguing and fighting; chairperson taking control of meeting." "People who interrupt should not be allowed to come in." "The people who don't stop talking get kicked out." "The people who don't turn up all the time lose the position then we elect a new person for the job." "It would be better if we had tonnes more people." "I think it would be better if nobody would talk too much." "If the president doesn't turn up, we could elect a new president." "Not to put bossy people for the president of the JSC." "To get the ideas working instead of just letting them sit there."

And there were practical ideas about the meetings: "Have a practice meeting at the start of the year." "Making rules, so things are pleasant for members without dictating." "Time limit to fit everything in." "Routine organised at the meetings." "Have an agenda; everybody should have a list of things that we are going to talk about." "Know how long to have everything for, so they can get through the agenda." "I think the JSC should get a folder to put reports from meetings in." "Be well organised before each meeting and people should say to apologise if they can't come." "If people can't make any meeting they should contact the president and have a reason." "Talking slower so the secretary can write it all down." "Talking one at a time." "Have rules and not to argue with one another." "Do not swear; all be friends; one person talks at a time; be happy." "The Captains should remember when the meeting should start and finish if they have them." "Draw up a list of people who will chair meetings. The Chairperson has to be in charge of the weekly bulletin."

***

As well as the actual meetings of JSCs, students saw that the links they had with other students in the grades were central to improved operation of the JSC: "JSCs could be better if they gave reports to their grades." "Make sure every class has class meetings." "Class meetings to be time-tabled so people don't forget." "Take it in turns to take a grade meeting." "Get children in grades to speak more and give more ideas." "Tell what they want, not just agree." "The representatives should listen to the people in our school and not just say what we think."

There was recognition that the active involvement of some JSC representatives must be extended to all students: "Involve all students." "Get the deputy reps involved." "Help the little ones in JSC." "Survey children often." "Keep little kids involved." "Keep infants involved in activities." "Include Prep and Grade 1-2 children." "Involve outside people."

The JSC should also pay attention to its formal and informal communication with others: "Talk to a friend." "Sending newsletters out on what the JSC has done." "Inform other people of what is happening - talk to students; information in newsletters." "I think that we should report to assembly."

There were some comments about the election process for JSCs: "To be elected you need to make a speech to your grade. Vote for the JSC at the end of the year, for next year. Then the new JSC could be told what to do by the old JSC."

***

The JSCs also planned to develop their links with other groups such as:
School Council: "Go to School Council meetings to see what's going on." "Going to School Council to give your opinion and see how the School Council works."

Teachers: "If we ask the teachers their opinion about our discussion." "Some people going to the teachers' school meeting."

Outside the school: "Visiting old people's home etc so we have more to do with people outside the school."

Other schools: "Be more involved in other schools" JSCs." "We can have someone like the Principal to go to special meetings with other schools." "Invite other JSCs to our schools or go to their schools."

Parents: "Getting parents involved." "Bring parents to a morning tea and show a video on JSC activities."

***

Finally, the students looked forward to a successful conclusion to an effective year: "How about if this year we don't slack off and really try to get something done." "I think JSC should go on forever because it makes you and your friends happy, especially teachers." "At the end of the year, JSC could hold some sort of celebration if the Council is run properly."
SSICC: For a Healthy SRC in Your School

SKILLS..STRUCTURES..IDEAS..CLIMATE..CURRICULUM

In a word ... SSICC!!

The above is presented as an analytical tool that may be useful in assessing the effectiveness of an SRC in a particular school. It is also posed as a way of thinking about what might be done to improve the operation of a particular SRC.

Enthusiastic and capable students, supportive and energetic teachers, appreciative and caring school executives are not individually enough. A productive combination of all these factors is needed before student participation, in the form of a truly successful SRC, can thrive.

* Does the SRC have good communication links to and from the School Council?
* Does the school provide adequate accountancy and ancillary support?
* Are SRC activities carefully timetabled into the whole year and each term's programming? eg adequate time for meetings, timing of elections and installation of new office holders.

Observation suggests that this area has not been fully explored to date.

Ideas

Can the SRC members generate practical ideas for improving their school? Are they able to collect ideas from all parts of the school population? Can the best of these ideas be drawn together into a co-ordinated plan for action?

It is the translation from good idea to practical action which is the most common stumbling point for many an SRC.

Possibly the average SRC's strongest area. Most members are full of good ideas for the improvement of their schools. Thinking is creative and divergent and exciting.

Climate

This refers to the broad educational context in which an SRC operates.

* Is student opinion a positive factor in the management of the school community?
* Is student participation highly valued and fostered by the Principal, Faculty Heads, teachers, parents and students?
* Does the school give suitable status to the teacher/s who coordinates the SRC? Does this include a period allowance?
* Is responsible and energetic dissent accommodated?
* Is there an Executive member who acts as a liaison person?
* Does the average teacher know who the members of the SRC are? Do they know about the major activities and concerns of the SRC?

Observations suggest that 'climate' varies greatly from school to school: AI to very poor.
Curriculum

This refers to the learning/teaching that goes on in a school.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of 'SSICC'. Analysis suggests that unless there is curriculum support (ie teachers are teaching and students are learning), then issues get steadily pushed to one side. In a busy, crowded teaching/learning year there is subtle competition between issues and the attention each receives. This key support for SRCs is being widely ignored. A major concern is that SRCs operate most often in a curriculum vacuum. The very best efforts of numerous participants may well be undone in this situation.

Student participation can be integrated into the curriculum, enhancing the image of SRCs and providing a link to the wider task of political education in general. SRCs can provide concrete examples of the democratic structures with which we Australians govern ourselves eg the election of members could become the centre point of a number of interesting courses.

The onus to teach/learn about our democratic society is asserted clearly and loudly in much of the formal documentation that surrounds the operation of Public Education here in NSW. To date, few schools have responded energetically to this task, not have they linked this area of curriculum to SRCs.

There are already numerous opportunities for students to learn about parliament, elections, democracy, voting, electorates and the like: History, Legal Studies, Social Studies, Society and Culture, Economics, Commerce and a range of OAS courses. Such an approach also provides opportunities for the school community to forge useful and supportive links with outside entities - local members, local councils, business organisations, unions etc.

Observations suggest that a lot more could be done in this area.

Summary

'SSICC' is evolved as an analytical tool and doubtless there will be various opinions as to its effectiveness when seeking to assess the situation in a particular school. So be it! Doing the assessment is the critical outcome.

Andrew FitzSimons
'Staying On'
Cartwright Centre
Cartwright Public School
Cartwright NSW 2168

Safety in shade shelter

THE MESSAGE about the cancer risk from too much sun has hit home at Thornbury Secondary College where action by the Student Representative Council has resulted in a shade shelter next to the canteen. No longer will students have to queue up for food in the sweltering sun, says the SRC’s publicity officer Dimitria Manolopoulos.

“When you were waiting for the canteen you got roasted.”

The shelter is like a large paved pergola, with large planter boxes. Students will soon plant hardy indigenous vegetation in the boxes.

SRC president Nectaria Kalpakidis said the shelter would probably be entered in the Anti-Cancer Council’s SunSmart competition.

This is designed to encourage schools to set up their own sun protection programs.

Thornbury Secondary College appears to be sun-conscious already.

Dimitria said students were much more aware this year of the dangers of too much sun as the media was now “saying it’s cool to have fair skin”.

At the school’s last swimming competition students sported their house colours in zinc cream on their faces, while the school-magazine coverage of the competition ran photos of people with their sun hats on.

And the suggestion for a shelter where students could have their lunch came first from other students, said Dimitria.

The SRC took up the idea, and raised money towards the project last year. The school found the rest and the shelter was built during the summer holidays.

Students Representative Council president Nectaria Kalpakidis enjoys the shade underneath the shelter for students at Thornbury Secondary College.
Those of you who read the July 1989 issue of Connect will be familiar with Youth Forum; we're a NSW based organisation that works extensively with young people in the area of participation-based training and education. Our main focus area is student participation; building the motivation, providing the opportunities and passing on the skills to enable young people to take a more active role in changing their environment.

In the past, our primary area of work has been the Student Council system in NSW high schools, however, as times change, we have changed too, and are looking at working in a number of new and exciting areas. This article is an update on some of the activities we've been involved in since last June, and some of the opportunities for Youth Forum that, as yet, are still in the pipeline.

ISSUES FORUMS

Youth Forum began, in 1979. The International Year of the Child, as a one-off forum for young people to come together and discuss the issues that affected their lives. The success of this event led to the formation of Youth Forum the organisation, and to the continuation of the forum, at Mitchell College in Bathurst, for every year until 1987. At this time, our funding situation forced us to abandon the yearly forum, and the Youth Effectiveness Skills Program (the YES Program for short), a workshop-based program, became one of two modern incarnations of the earlier Youth Forum.

YES has concentrated mainly on running single day skills workshops for young people, particularly those involved in Student Councils. Issues forums, however, have always remained close to the hearts of the majority of the people involved in our organisation. We tend to feel that the opportunity for young people to come together to discuss issues and plan action for their local communities based around these discussions is an enormously empowering experience for anyone involved.

1990 may well prove to be year when Youth Forum has the opportunity to "get back to its roots" in terms of again running issues forums. A number of such forums are in the pipeline at the moment. A long dreamed of chance to run a National forum for young people is looking to be a possibility. Such a forum would probably be based on the model used from 1979 to 1987 at Bathurst. Basically, gather a small group of young people from around the country, and train them to organise the forum, which would probably run over a number of days. They would need the skills to run "getting to know you" groups so that the young people at the forum would feel comfortable enough in an environment where they did not know the majority of participants to be able to speak their minds on the issues that concerned them, in an open and honest way. They would also be responsible for facilitating discussion groups on the various issues dealt with at the forum. Hopefully, the YES Program would be able to set up a support network that would come into action after the forum had finished, to see that any action plans that came out of the forum would be implemented. Of course, the main obstacle to holding such a forum (and the only reason we haven't done one already) is the question of funding. However, a potential sponsor has been lined up, and we are hopeful the forum will go ahead.

Other potential forums for 1990 include the possibility of a Sydney-based forum for young people from a non-English speaking background. Such a forum would centre on the difficulties that students from non-Anglo cultures experience in our education system, and hopefully result in the students formulating ways that they can take action in their schools to change the current situation.

There is also the possibility of running an issues workshop in one of the many regional centres in NSW, where young people could come together to discuss not only educational issues, but look at things on a broader level. The YES Program's sibling organisation, the Youth and the Law Project which operated in the south-west suburbs of Sydney, had great success in tapping into the concerns of young people in that area and motivating them to take action that would improve their situation. Tamworth, in northern NSW, has been raised as a possible location for such a forum, and there is already substantial enthusiasm from a number of teachers in that area.

A final, recently raised possibility has been the prospect of a forum on the AIDS virus, and the issues it raises for young people in the 1990s. We have yet to give a lot of thought to such a forum, however the issue of AIDS has increasing importance us all, and it is hoped that Youth Forum could lend its significant experience in working with young people to the school-based programs that are being put into place by the Department of Health and the AIDS Council Of NSW.

TRAINING YOUNG FACILITATORS

In response to the demands of many schools who want to pass on the benefits of Youth Forum's methods to an entire year, but for various reasons simply cannot hold a workshop for around 200 students, we are busy at the moment trying out a new type of workshop with year eight students at Ambarvale High School, in Sydney's south-west. The teachers at that school identified the need for self-esteem work to be done with the students. They felt that by-and-large the students weren't being listened to, and their ideas weren't being acted upon.

We were approached to attempt to come up with a program to deal with this situation. The funding available for the workshop meant that we were unable to work with the whole year, however the program we will be implementing should both meet the needs expressed and have other benefits as well. We will be training a group of year eight students to work with small groups of their peers, to get their ideas on the changes they would like to see implemented in their school through a
YOUTH FORUM

Some of the staff of Youth Forum - (l-r) James, Bridge, Nick, Susan, Mel, Liz, Adam, Kellie and Jad (on floor).

combination of brainstorming, discussion and group activities. The students will then take these ideas to the Student Council at that school and ensure that these ideas are put into practice.

The benefits of this process are that not only will it allow the year eight student to see their ideas are carried out, it will create a smaller group of students who have the important skills of being able to facilitate their peers in discussing ideas, and will have had hands-on experience in dealing with older students and the school administration, it should help to counter the situation that is unfortunately prevalent in many of NSW's Student Councils; the seniors do the majority of the work and the younger students are unable to participate.

GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

We are also continuing to take opportunities available to us to tell people in the education industry about the methods we use in our workshops. In addition to using publications such as Connect we run workshops to demonstrate our methods at the conferences held by the Australian Consortium on Experiential Education. We participated in last year's International Conference on Experiential Learning, and despite (perhaps because of) the fact that all the people involved in running the session there were under 24, we were told by participants in the session that it was one of the highlights of the conference for them.

ALL THIS AND EVERYTHING ELSE AS WELL

Apart from everything else already mentioned we are continuing to do everything we've done up to now at YES. We are still running workshops with schools throughout the state, and helping their Student Councils increase the impact they have on their environment. We are now experimenting with the use of drama, painting, and other, less "booky" methods, in our workshops in schools. These methods have so far proved extremely successful, providing not only more variety in the process of teaching, but tapping into the needs of students whose learning styles are not compatible with more traditional methods.

In addition to this, our interschool workshops - where students from Student Councils all over the Sydney metropolitan area meet to discuss the activities they are involved in, look at ways to solve any problems they are having and participate in skills development sessions - are better attended than ever. Last year we had around 100 students at each of these events; this year over 200 students will be attending the first interschool for the year.

And despite all the new opportunities for Youth Forum over 1990 we have kept the same approach to education; that it should be experiential, it should be relevant, and above all it should be fun!

You can contact us at this address:
Youth Forum Ltd
PO Box 371
STRAWBERRY HILLS NSW 2012
Ph: (02) 699-9077
(if necessary, reverse charges)

The office is generally staffed on a Tuesday and Friday, but we have an answering machine running on other days, so give us a call!
VIDEObEAT 1990

Videobeat, the video 'magazine' produced by students of Sydney's Disadvantaged High Schools is underway for another year.

Three episodes are planned, to cover the issues of:

- Sexual Stereotyping
- Image and the Media
- Politics and Power
- Misfit Mysteries
- Age, Sex, Limits and Expectations
- Fashion Fads

Each episode represents the contributions of Videobeat crews from 12 schools, who explore the issues by interviewing students, staff and the local community.

The school production teams receive training assistance and post-production facilities at the DSP Centre, which services the region's Disadvantaged Schools with resources, consultancy and resource production among other things.

Through participating in Videobeat, students gain skills in interviewing techniques, as well as camera and sound operating, editing, scripting and planning a program.

Videobeat allows for students to make their own personal contributions in the form of wit, humour and style, emerging from diverse cultural backgrounds characteristic of DSP schools.

The finished programs are distributed back to high schools, where they are incorporated into subjects such as English, Media and Social Sciences to raise further analyses of the issues.

Teachers report that the benefits to students involved with Videobeat are overwhelming, as they witness the growth in confidence, communication skills and creativity among their students.

For further information, contact Kim Raschepkin, DSP Productions, DSP Resource Centre - Metropolitan East Region, Cnr Bridge and Swanson Street, Erskineville NSW 2043, or phone Kim on (02) 517 6815.

ACSA

Connect has taken responsibility for coordinating the Student Participation Network of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA). It is hoped to include a specific ACSA section in issues of Connect, and particularly to focus attention towards the Curriculum '91 Conference (University of Adelaide, 11th - 14th July 1991).

ACSA publishes Curriculum Perspectives and other information. For membership information, contact the ACSA Treasurer, Mr Russell Matthews, School of Education, Deakin University, Warrn Ponds, Vic 3217.

DSP

Poverty, Education and the Disadvantaged Schools Program is a research program being undertaken for the Department of Employment, Education and Training by Sociology Staff at Macquarie University. Seven reports of the research are available to interested persons from the Disadvantaged Schools Program, Schools Programs Branch, Victorian Ministry of Education, GPO Box 4367, Melbourne 3001. Phone: (03) 628 2211.

REQUEST

I saw your name in the (US) National Directory of Alternative Schools and decided to contact you because I've been wanting to know about Australian schools.

I first started with educational problems, especially the educational system in Japan and then developing to ecological and global thinking. I feel that the connection with people is important.

I want to work as a staff member in an alternative school. I can't speak English fluently but I'm studying it. Then I will teach Japanese to foreigners.

I have a son who is 11 years old, in the fifth grade of the public school. He is hoping to study in Australia.

The important thing is that I'm not rich, I hope that my son's tuition would be free or low-cost, perhaps connected with my work. I don't know whether I would be paid as a staff member.

I am enquiring about Australian schools - I wonder if there is some school that answers my expectation.

We're looking forward to hearing from you.

Junko Nishimura
37 Honenin Nishimachi
26 Shishigadani Sakyō-ku, Kyoto, 606 JAPAN
**Local & Overseas Publications Received**

Connect receives many publications directly or indirectly relevant to youth and student participation. We can't lend or sell these, but if you want to look at or use them, contact us on (03) 489.9052:

**OVERSEAS STUDENT PUBLICATION:**
- Foxfire (Georgia, USA) Vol 23 No 2, Summer 1989.

**OTHER SOURCES:**
- Network News (Surry Hills, NSW) Mar '90
- Prospectus (Lance Holt School, Fremantle, WA).
- Poverty, Education and the Disadvantaged Schools Program, Reports 1-7.
- Aero-Gramme (New York, USA) No 2 February 1990.
- Options (Youth Bureau, Canberra, ACT) February, March 1990.
- National Coalition News (NCACS, Tennesee, USA) Vol 14 No 2, Fall 1989.
- Skole (NCACS, USA) V 5 N 1 Summer '89
- Hands On (Foxfire, USA) Issue 33, Fall/Winter 1989.
- SCIP Newsletter (South Melbourne, Vic) No 9, March 1990.
- Curriculum Perspectives (ACSA) Vol 10 No 1, March 1990.

**Articles:**

The articles listed in this column are of general background value or otherwise not appropriate for reproducing in the columns of Connect. However, they are available on photocopy for research purposes. The length and cost (copying and postage) are listed. Please order by code number. (A fuller listing is available in Connect 46/47 - to October 1987.)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description/Pages/Cost</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>338</td>
<td>A Guide to Small, Independent and Community Schools in Western Australia 10 pp; $1.00</td>
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**RADIO TIMES**

Connect has secured a small number of copies of Radio Times, a "basic broadcasting handbook" by Derek Holmes (then of 3RRR-FM in Melbourne). This handbook was produced in 1986. It includes sections on: The Radio Station (background to radio in Australia and to the structure of radio stations); Technical Radio (setting up a studio and using equipment); Practical Radio (types of programs, writing, announcing, music, interviewing etc); plus appendices and a glossary.

Copies are available from Connect for $3 (postage included) as long as the 6 copies last!

**FOXFIRE BOOKS—ORDER NOW**

Eliot Wigginton from Foxfire will be bringing various publications with him in July. Copies of Sometimes a Shining Moment will be available at workshops and talks. While we cannot give a price at this point, you can order copies from Connect - we will notify you about cost and availability.

**Friends of Connect:**

By subscribing at a higher level, the following have helped keep Connect going. We gratefully acknowledge receipt of the following financial contributions since the last issue of Connect:

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